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STATE FOR EAP/CM, INR AND DRL  
STATE FOR R - MARK DAVIDSON  
STATE FOR EAP/PD - NIDA EMMONS  
STATE FOR IIP/EAP - ROBERT HOLDEN  
NSC FOR LOI, KUCHTA-HELBLING

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SUBJECT: GRAB THE TIGER BY THE TAIL: ONLINE REPORTS OF CORRUPTION ON  
THE RISE IN EAST CHINA

REF: A. (A) 08 SHANGHAI 505

[1](#)B. (B) 06 SHANGHAI 6344 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)C. (C) 08 SHANGHAI 494

[1](#)D. (D) 08 SHANGHAI 471

[1](#)E. (E) SHANGHAI 149

[1](#)F. (F) 08 SHANGHAI 540

[1](#)G. (G) 08 SHANGHAI 527

[1](#)H. (H) 08 BEIJING 4522

CLASSIFIED BY: CHRISTOPHER BEEDE, POL/ECON CHIEF, U.S. CONSULATE  
SHANGHAI, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

#### Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Online reports of corruption in East China appear to have increased over the past year. In particular, "Human Flesh Search Engines," where netizens post derogatory information about local government officials, are attracting greater public attention in East China. While East China netizens continue to post reports detailing the corrupt practices of local officials, our contacts said, online criticism of the Central Government remains strictly controlled. East China officials, including Shanghai's Party Secretary, also co-opt the internet through webchats or by posting letters online to shape public opinion. Several contacts expressed concern that a lack of rule of law in East China provides average citizens with few options to vent their frustrations, leaving posting blogs about corruption as their only viable alternative. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) An analysis of online media reports and blogs on corruption cases involving officials in Shanghai's Consular District (which includes Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Anhui Provinces) provides anecdotal evidence that the number of reported cases in East China is increasing. (Note: A partial list of recent East China cases is included in the appendix in para 15 below. End Note.) Discussions with Shanghai-based political reformers, legal scholars, and internet experts underscored the growing significance of the internet as a tool to combat corruption in East China.

#### East China Netizens Reporting on Corrupt "Tigers"

[1](#)3. (C) Consulate contacts claim that the internet is making an increasingly significant contribution to the development of civil society in East China. Wang Xiaoyu, a Charter 08

signatory and a professor at Tongji University, told PolOff and ConOff on March 10 that netizens typically do not bother to post information online about the petty corruption of low-level officials but choose to "go after" local government officials who are considered "big fish," or, as Wang described, "tigers." For example, netizens posted blogs (later reported in the mainstream media) of one "tiger," Xin Weiming, the Vice Governor of Shanghai's Luwan District, who mysteriously disappeared while on a government-sponsored trip to Paris in October 2008 (Ref A).

In many cases, Wang said, it is less likely for an individual to report local officials at home since they have to "live with that official." Wang added that it is impossible to know the origin of online reports or how netizens obtain their information, but many reports could stem from internal whistleblowers. China has few whistleblower protections, Wang said, so the only alternative is to report malfeasance online.

14. (C) In Shanghai, where corruption remains a sensitive issue in the aftermath of the 2006 Shanghai Party Secretary Chen Liangyu scandal (Ref B), our interlocutors asserted there are fewer publicly reported corruption cases -- both online and in the traditional media -- than in other parts of East China. For example, Professor Zhu Xueqin, Dean of the Peace and Development Institute at Shanghai University, said that there has been greater online reporting of corruption in East China over the past six months, but relatively speaking, there are noticeably fewer cases in Shanghai. He pointed to an early March 2009 report on the murder of Li Mingyun, former Party Secretary of Qingpu Industrial Park, stating that the case was reported by the media in a "skillful" way to imply corruption without directly saying as much (septel to follow).

#### Human Flesh Search Engines in East China

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15. (C) "Human Flesh Search Engines," where netizens post derogatory and often unsubstantiated information about local government officials caught in embarrassing situations, appear to be attracting greater public attention in East China. Hou Fang of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) said the popularity of "Human Flesh Search Engines" is further proof that there is a widespread perception that the Central Discipline Inspection Committee (CDIC) is able to investigate only a few cases, and those cases involving well-connected officials will not be taken seriously. Official CDIC investigations lack transparency because they do not release details to the public until the investigation is completed, Hou said. At the same time, however, many East China observers are uncomfortable with "Human Flesh Search Engines," saying they break the spirit of the law, presume guilt, and lack privacy protections. According to Hou, the only path forward is to develop and reform official reporting methods so that corruption is investigated in a transparent manner. A journalism professor at the Central Party School's China Executive Leadership Academy on Pudong (CELAP) recently said that many local government officials see the benefits of exposing graft online through "Human Flesh Search Engines," but they are concerned about creating a "mob mentality."

16. (C) Shanghai University's Zhu Xueqin stated that the negative side of the "Human Flesh Search Engines" reminds him of the Cultural Revolution; the "online mob" can say anything it wants and "use words like pitchforks" without solid evidence. Wang Xiaoyu pointed out that the trend has attracted attention in the mainstream media, and the Xinhua News Agency recently reported that the new practice may leave local government officials "before a kangaroo court of angry netizens." China's Supreme People's Court, which has sought to "limit the ability of netizens to act as an online mob," also is paying attention. "Human Flesh Search Engines" remain popular, however, because they "give people a voice," Zhu Xueqin said. In one high profile case of netizen outrage leading to the sacking of an East China official, Wang Xiaoyu cited Zhou Jiugeng, a former real estate bureau official in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, who was pilloried online after a blogger posted a photo of Zhou wearing what appeared to be a USD 14,000 Vacheron Constantin watch and smoking USD 25 per pack cigarettes. Another example

was that of Wei Juntu, Party Secretary and Director General of the Auditing Bureau in Dongyang Municipality, Zhejiang Province, who submitted four bills totaling USD 1,042 for massage services in 2003, and those bills were recently posted on Tianyu.cn, one of China's most popular bulletin boards. Both Zhou and Wei were removed from their posts.

#### East China Views on Internet Censorship

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17. (C) While East China netizens continue to post reports detailing the corrupt practices of local officials, our contacts said, online criticism of the Central Government remains strictly controlled. Zhu Xueqin used a cat-and-mouse analogy to describe government efforts to censor the internet. He stated that in the late 1990s, the "cat" (Central Government) was asleep, and the "mice" could run around without much interference; however, at the start of this decade, "the cat woke up." Zhu believes the Central Government will be able to strengthen its control over the internet despite the increasing number of netizens. According to Zhu, the Central Government has the funding and technical capacity to exercise control, and the Communist Party's leadership is not willing to relinquish this power as long as it remains insecure about its ability to retain political power. Wang Xiaoyu agreed, stating that East China netizens must deal with the fact that the level and sophistication of internet censorship is likely to grow.

18. (C) Hou Fang at SASS stated that while the Central Government is particularly concerned about cases involving Central Government officials (such postings are usually removed immediately), reports of corrupt local officials are often allowed to remain. He notes that these blog postings are used by government officials to collect information and evidence on corruption cases. During a March 19-20 visit to Shanghai, Rebecca MacKinnon, former CNN Bureau Chief in Beijing and currently a journalism professor at Hong Kong University, stated that from the Central Government's perspective, allowing citizens in East China and other parts of the country to post blogs about corruption also serves the Central Government's anti-corruption objectives, putting "the fear of God into local cadres," demonstrating to local officials that they are being watched.

#### The Internet and Public Opinion

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19. (C) Local government officials in East China also co-opt the internet through webchats or by posting letters in order to shape public opinion. Xie Youping, a law professor at Fudan University, observed that the internet has allowed netizens to express their opinions, which has had a positive impact on governance in East China, as local officials increasingly are also using the internet to gauge public opinion. Like MacKinnon, he stated that many local government officials believe online reports of corruption help the government's anti-corruption efforts, for which the officials in charge can take credit during the Central Government's annual March plenary legislative session in Beijing. With newspapers too controlled for "democratic" expression, Xie said, the internet helps fill the void in East China.

10. (C) Officials in Shanghai have followed Premier Wen Jiabao's lead, frequently "appearing" for online webchats. Shanghai Municipal Party Secretary Yu Zhengsheng participated in one well-publicized webchat on November 6, 2008 (Ref C). Xie Youping also pointed to the case of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in Changzhou, Jiangsu Province, to demonstrate the evolving way in which local government officials in East China use the internet. In a posting on October 6, 2008, a netizen wrote that the Changzhou city government's purpose for building the BRT was for the mayor and other high-level officials to benefit from kickbacks. On October 18, Changzhou Mayor Wang Weicheng responded to the blog by posting a letter, stating that the blogger showed "no moral character" and characterized the October 6 posting as "libel against me using rumors." At the close of his three-page letter, the mayor wrote: "You can express your views about the performances of the government and

the mayor. I can even understand and forgive the use of extreme language. But you cannot make up rumors to libel people" (Ref D).

¶11. (C) The Consul General discussed the BRT controversy with Changzhou public transit officials during a visit to the city on March 31 (Ref E). Project consultant Xu Kangming, an American citizen, told the CG he believed the accusations of corruption, stemming from an alleged relationship between the mayor's wife and the owner of the bus company, were off-base. Once allegations are made, however, it is difficult to assess the veracity of the claims. Vice Mayor Han Jiayu told the CG that Changzhou's e-government initiatives receive much attention from the local government's leadership, and city leaders believe they can use the internet to refute allegations as Mayor Wang did during the BRT dust-up. Xie Youping told CongenOffs that a whole new generation of officials is embracing the opportunity to communicate via the internet with citizens, as they realize it is critical to maintaining popular support for the Party -- especially in East China.

The Bottom Line: Only Means to Vent Frustrations  
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¶12. (C) Several contacts expressed concern that a lack of rule of law in East China provides average citizens with few options to vent their frustrations, leaving posting blogs about corruption as their only viable alternative. Hou Fang stated that currently there is a culture of unaccountability in China, as the law is not applied equally. Officials who have extensive connections, who are adept at avoiding detection, or who take part in only "small-scale corrupt acts" have little to worry about in the current system, he said. Hou believes that the foundation of corruption in China is structural, and that the largest source of corruption in China is that Municipal Governments have few methods to raise funds other than through land sales. (Comment: Hou was very interested in learning how municipalities in the United States raise revenue. End Comment.)

¶13. (C) Another legal reform that has proven difficult to implement due to significant resistance among Party officials, is the proposal that all high-level officials must publicly document and report their family assets. Hou states that there is a heated debate in the Party over the efficacy of such reporting, and significant concern about reporting the assets of family members and the privacy of this data. According to an April 9 report in Caijing magazine, the Shanghai Disciplinary Inspection Commission and Organization Department of the CPC Shanghai Standing Committee already have launched a program to require more than 2000 deputy bureau director and higher level officials to report their housing assets.

¶14. (C) Frank Peng, Director of the World Bank Studies Center at Tongji University, told PolOff on April 13 that there is little information on how the asset reporting initiative will move forward, however, and he doubts the program will amount to much more than window dressing. Xie Youping added that until taxes, salaries, and local government subsidies are more transparent, such efforts will inevitably fail, stating that citizens do not currently have access to dependable local or provincial budget information, so reliable asset reporting is probably a long ways off.

Appendix: Online Reports of Corruption in East China  
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¶15. (C) In the period since mid-2008, there appears to have been an increase in the number of online reports -- from both blogs and traditional media -- of corruption involving local government officials in East China. A sampling of cases includes:

--Implicating several high-level officials in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province with purchasing housing at below market prices, a four-page document entitled, "name list of external buyers of extra relocation housing at a temporary price" was posted on sohu.com and sina.com sites on March 23, 2009 and then widely

distributed by netizens. The list of officials included: Wenzhou Vice Mayor Chen Zuorong, the Vice Director of the Wenzhou Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the Deputy Party Secretary of Wenzhou's Public Security Bureau, and the city's deputy chief prosecutor.

--The Shanghai Daily reported in February 2009 that Dong Feng, former Party Secretary of a district in Jiangsu's Xuzhou City, and his mistress Chen Wen were found guilty of soliciting and accepting bribes worth US\$412,269 on 44 occasions. Dong was sentenced to 13 years in prison.

--Zhou Jiugeng, head of a district real estate bureau in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province was dismissed from his job after netizens posted photos in December 2008 of Zhou smoking expensive cigarettes and wearing what appeared to be a US\$14,000 Vacheron Constantin watch. Rumors also circulated in the blogosphere that Zhou drove a Cadillac. Zhou was removed for "expressing inappropriate opinions and spending office funds on luxury cigarettes."

--Sina.com reported in February 2009 that Kang Huijin, Vice Governor of Pudong District, was sentenced to life in prison for accepting bribes worth RMB 6 million (nearly USD 1 million) from 1993 to 2007. Kang was also accused of possessing property worth RMB 11.84 Million, from unknown sources. Kang's wife received a five-year jail term for her involvement, and their assets were seized.

--Local media reported in February 2009 that Wei Juntu, Party Secretary and Director General of Zhejiang Province's Dongyang City Auditing Bureau was removed for using public funds to pay for massage services. He submitted four bills totaling US\$1,042 for services at a massage parlour in 2003, and these bills were first posted by a netizen on Tianya.cn on January 20.

--According to a December 2008 Xinhua News report, Chen Shili, previously the top legislator in Huainan City, Anhui Province was convicted and sentenced to death for abuse of power after taking USD 875,000 in bribes from at least 7 companies from 1991 to 2007. When arrested in May 2008, he was the Chairman of the Huainan Municipal People's Congress.

--Xin Weiming, Vice Governor of Shanghai's Luwan District, disappeared while on a government-sponsored trip to Paris in October 2008 (Ref A). He has yet to be linked to any crime; however, online blogs are rife with speculation over his involvement in corruption. Succumbing to public pressure, he resigned in December.

--Yang Xianghong, an official in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, who overstayed a 12-day European tour in September 2008, was dismissed from office after two Wenzhou municipal government officials dispatched to find him in Paris were unable to persuade him to return. The Wenzhou municipal government also sent two officials to Paris in a futile attempt to persuade Yang to return (Ref F). Hexun.com reported on April 1 that Yang's wife, You Jie, had been arrested for money laundering after it was revealed that she had wired RMB 20 million (USD 3 million) to her daughter in France one month before Yang's disappearance.

--Xinhua News Agency reported on November 28, 2008 that official delegations from Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province and Xinyu, Jiangxi Province allegedly traveled to the United States for purported official purposes but abused public funds by spending money on tourism in various destinations. The report was based on an internet blog posted by an individual who claimed to have discovered documents that prove the delegations used public funds for personal travel to Las Vegas, Niagara Falls, and elsewhere. The documents reportedly were found in a Shanghai subway stop, and the netizen posted copies of the documents on the internet (Ref F).